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ABSTRACT

There is a set of difficult Spanish grammar questions (ser-estar, preterite-imperfect, subjunctive-indicative, word order, and prepositions) in which the description of the semantic component is essential. Even though generative formulations treat them in differing ways, these questions possess the common characteristic of associating a form difference (of lexical form, syntactic configuration, or both) with a language-significant difference in meaning. This paper summarizes the semantic structuring of these questions as presently found in the literature. A relation is hypothesized between that semantic structuring and enduring principal features of Spanish culture, evidenced by values encountered as major themes in Hispanic literature and customs and the Hispanic historical experience. Finally, a model is hypothesized which admits the influence of cultural structure via the structuring of "lexical" form-meaning correspondences, but which also admits the parallel and coordinate influence of universal structure (perhaps partially from innate ideas) in culture and the lexicon, and via grammatical formators. (Author/CFM)

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CULTURAL VALUES AND LEXICAL FEATURES

IN SPANISH GRAMMAR

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I will attempt to demonstrate that some of the most difficult Spanish grammar questions are lexical or supralexical in nature, that their formulation requires entering semantic features at various points in the grammatical description, and that there exist suggestive parallels between the more relativistic of these semantic features and corresponding principal values encountered in Spanish culture.

I will argue that these relationships support a linguistic model in which: 1) semantic forces function at all points to constrain the grammatical calculus; and 2) cultural structure influences linguistic structure through lexical and supra-lexical form - meaning correspondences. The first of these assertions is in harmony with generative semantic precepts. The second is not a rewarming of the Whorf-Sapir hypothesis, but rather incorporates the coordinate operation of relativist and universal determinants of structure in culture, the lexicon, and grammar.

I will summarize and comment upon six Spanish grammar questions: the prepositions, the preterit-imperfect, ser-estar, the subjunctive vs. the indicative, fixed word order, and free word order. Since none of these questions has been definitively settled, I will strive to reflect this unsettledness in my discussion.

María Luisa López 1970 underlines in her extensive study the varying semantic and syntactic nature of the preposition. For example, de may be full of meaning as in viene del lago, or it may be a relatively empty element in which the syntactic function predominates, as in un hombre de seis pies, or de hacerlo así. The preposition a has similar possibilities. It is full of meaning in voy a Sevilla, but is predominantly syntactic in le miré a María, or llovió a cántaros.

But, as María Luisa López demonstrates, there is no simple division between when a preposition is semantically full and when it is relatively empty. There is, rather, on the abstract level of rules and competence, a well-defined semantic feature connected with each preposition. It is a feature of relation that is in opposition to the contrasting relational features connected with the other prepositions. At the level of performance, however, when a preposition is placed in context, the

connected feature may be intensified or attenuated by the preposition's greater or lesser semantic or syntactic role.[1] In any case, the underlying semantic feature is the same, and the syntactic function of the preposition usually bears an analogy to the lexical meaning conveyed in other contexts. None of this, of course, obviates the frequent neutralization of contrasts between prepositions, as in dar a beber vs. dar de beber, or daba vueltas en torno de la mesa vs. daba vueltas en torno a la mesa.[2]

As Pottier and others remarked before María Luisa López, the relationships expressed by the prepositions derive from universal spatial relations, which are also reflected in temporal and notional analogs. Moreover, in the context of philosophy of language, Uhlan von Slagle 1974 has attested that the spatial relations expressed by prepositions in many languages are semantic universals inherent to human thought and are expressed somehow by all languages, though not necessarily through prepositions. This semantic universality will affect the shape of the linguistic model.

What is significant in the foregoing for purposes of my discussion is: 1)the prepositions connect well-defined semantic features with a lexical form; 2) the connected feature also underlies most of the preposition's syntactic functions (this must be interpreted as the lexical entry of a semantic feature which exercises a syntactic constraint) ; and 3) the features connected with the prepositions are by the accounts of many philosophers and psychologists universal to human thought and perception.

William E. Bull applied his formulation of aspect to the description of the Spanish preterit and imperfect.[3] In his well-known explanations, Bull asserted that aspect involves two ways of viewing events. Imperfective aspect (attached to the imperfect form) is associated with an event viewed as ongoing. Perfective aspect (attached to the preterit form) is associated with an event that is viewed as begun or ended.

Bull also pointed out that the two aspects combine with different features of context to develop the various meanings used in textbooks to explain the preterit-imperfect. Typical of these contexts are adverbs and cyclic vs. non-cyclic events, which are so well-known they need no exemplification.

Important to my discussion is: that the preterit and imperfect forms attach directly to semantic features that point to attitudinal referents in private experience. They are thus lexical in nature, and the occurrence of the semantic feature constrains an obligatory grammatical choice. Contrasted to the prepositions, however, the perfective-imperfective opposition is crystallized in Spanish in a uniquely Hispanic manner, and therefore reflects the relativist aspects of the culture.

Mercedes Roldán 1974a,b. adds a remarkably elegant contribution to the formulation of ser-estar. Her semantic-based analysis states simply that both verbs are copula possessing distinct semantic features. The feature attached to ser is 'existence', while estar presupposes 'existence' and additionally bears the feature 'permanence at locus'. Existence incorporates not just the fact of something existing, but also its existing as a predicate of another element. The features explained previously by Bull as effects of ser-estar (e.g., 'change' vs. 'no change', with adjectives, or 'active' vs. 'stative' with past participles) are shown to result from the transfer of semantic features in other elements. The same rationale is convincingly applied to the ser passive, the estar progressive, and other constructions.

The most important insights here are that once again we are dealing with semantic features attached to lexical forms that point to attitudinal referents held in private experience. Moreover, the semantic feature again constrains an obligatory syntactic choice. Like the preterit-imperfect, ser-estar are crystallized in the language in a uniquely Hispanic way.

Uniquely Hispanic too is the Spanish subjunctive. But who can summarize the subjunctive? Bolinger 1974, 1976 and Lozano 1972, 1975 have gone back and forth

on it for a few years. Part of its great interest is how it overflows the formalizing bounds of linguistic theory.

The dialog between Bolinger and Lozano has clarified that it is not enough to define the semantic features contained in the expressions governing the subordinate clause, although such definition is useful. Like the preterit-imperfect and ser-estar, the subjunctive-indicative contrast is cued by semantic features that point to private attitudes concerning the content of the subordinate clause. Those attitudes can be summarized rigorously as 'factive' for the indicative and 'non-factive' for the subjunctive. But a satisfactory description should probably specify that non-factive includes such traditional categories as will, emotion, indefiniteness, unreality, unrealized future, etc.[4] It would also say that the governing expression is usually compatible with those attitudes (e.g., dudo que sea así), but that the attitude feature may often override the governing expression in some environments (e.g., dudo que es así), and that it is often the only determinant in others (supongo que vayas a ir).

An additional qualification that must be made is that the subjunctive's attitudinal feature is not connected in a lexical fashion with the verb form. It is instead associated with the verb plus the rest of the subordinate clause, and it colors the interpretation of the governing expression. It is attached to a complex lexico-syntactic configuration. The attitudinal feature is lexical, in that it adds referential meaning to the configuration, but it does so in the same way that intonation adds its distinguishing force to phonetic segments, by spanning a group. For this reason, I choose to strike a terminological parallel and refer to the attitudinal feature of the Spanish subjunctive as being supralexical.

Notice that once again we have in Spanish a private semantic feature exercising an obligatory syntactic constraint. However, now the point of entry is not through a single lexical element, but through a lexico-syntactic configuration. In a generative formulation, it would have to be entered via a transformation, after the basic phrase marker had been syntactically and lexically defined.

Fixed word order in Spanish non-sentence constructions conforms to an archetypal sequence that places pivative elements first (no, todo), followed by deictics (determiners, conjunctive pronouns), functional elements (auxiliary verbs, adverbs in -ly), quantifiers (numerals, limiting adjectives, quantitative adverbs), and lexical qualifiers (descriptive adjectives, adverbs).

Here again we are dealing with a lexico-syntactic configuration, constrained now by a feature of well-formedness, possibly both semantic and syntactic. But where would this constraint apply? In phrase structure? In surface structure? This is an open question. Since various other languages demonstrate similar fixed order, this structure must be considered quasi-universal. It, also, appears to be supralexical.

Heles Contreras 1976 has treated Spanish free word order in depth, adding to the insights of Bolinger, Hatcher, and Praguean authors. Following their lead, he has constructed a set of transformational rules constrained by rhemic semantic features. Stress assignment is included, to account for tradeoffs between stress and some free order.

In brief, the rules apply a rheme selection hierarchy based on case grammar categories to determine which element belongs nearer to the end of the sentence.

We must again question where to enter these rules and their associated semantic constraints. Their transformational nature may place them in the transformational component, but the assignment of stress must place them nearer to surface structure, and perhaps very close to the phonological rules. Like the subjunctive and fixed order, the rhemic feature is supralexical. And like fixed order, the rhemic values appear attached to free order in many languages, and are perhaps quasi-universal.

The Spanish grammar questions I have summarized attach a semantic feature to a lexical or supralexical form. In all cases but the prepositions, the semantic features point to attitudinal referents held in private experience. In the prepositions,

too, there is a notional analog of spatial relation underlying most syntactic uses. Finally, all of these questions incorporate semantic features constraining obligatory grammatical choices.

It is of interest to the consideration of the linguistic model that these features associate with lexical and supralexical forms, and that they appear to be entered at various points in the model. It is of great interest to the consideration of the relation between language and culture that Spanish has crystallized within it this collection of grammatical choices that center on communicating private attitudes. The combined effect is one of intensified attention to inner thoughts and feelings, to the definition of the boundaries between inner experience and the outer world, and to a formalized effort at making connections between the inner lives of persons and between those inner lives and the outer world. To refer to the cultural correlates of these aspects of Spanish, I will use the metaphors 'the garden', 'the wall', and 'the sword'. I can discuss them only quite briefly.

In the garden, Spanish culture cultivates the inner life, one's own and in intimacy with others. This concentration on inwardness, the ego, and intimacy is reflected in aspects of the subjunctive (will, emotion) and free order (theme-rheme focusses on communicating the unknown to another person). In social organization these Hispanic values are realized through the centrality of individuals and the family, the tertulia, the paseo, the dedication to leisure, the pervasiveness of religion. In literature, there are myriad examples of an intense concern with inwardness and intimacy. In the twentieth century, for example, Antonio Machado, Juan Ramón Jiménez, Pedro Salinas, García-Lorca.

The wall surrounds the Spanish garden, and the Spanish house has its outer doors and windows barred. There is an attempt to set and defend definite boundaries between the inner life and the outer world. This may be seen reflected in the distinctions between the preterit (past action in a concrete context) and imperfect (past action bearing only its conceptual content), ser (the reduction to existential and conceptual essence) and estar (existence plus an enduring concrete locus), subjunctive (indefiniteness, unreality) and indicative (definiteness, reality). In Spanish society, these

values are realized in the barriers set between the family and strangers, between one's community and other communities, between the nation and other nations. To these values can partially be ascribed the peculiarly Hispanic rhythm of monolithic conservatism alternating with explosive change. In literature, the topic of inner life relating to the outer world is a major theme that extends from earliest authors through the Quijote, Calderón (La vida es sueño) and Unamuno (Niebla) to present-day currents (Borges, García Márquez, Cortázar, etc.).

The sword is wielded against both the inner life and the outer world. I refer here to Hispanic voluntarism, in which both inner and outer reality are molded to fit the will. This creates the paradox that inner reality is treated as plastic and concrete, and the outer world as a malleable extension of inner concepts. These values are reflected principally in the subjunctive (emotion, will). In Spanish society, they are realized through intransigence in conflict, strong concepts of honor and pride, and heroic collective projects. In literature, this is also a principal theme which embraces Santa Teresa's striving for mystical union with God, Don Quijote's attempts to create an ideal order on earth, and Don Juan's idolatry of the will above all other natural or supernatural values and forces.

Turning to the linguistic model, let me introduce one last metaphor. Instead of conceiving of a linear connection between meaning and sound, in which syntax mediates absolutely, I believe we are better advised to think in terms of encapsulating layers by which culture surrounds meaning and meaning grammar, like the shell and white of an egg surround the yolk. Meaning, however, should also be seen as pervading the whole structure, constraining in many ways the grammatical and phonetic forms. With a model of this sort, I think we can proceed better to understand linguistic structure.

NOTES

1. María Luisa López 1970:145-5.

2. Op. cit.: 158-9.

3. Bull 1960, 1965.

4. Bolinger 1974:466.

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